The new PS/2 — business purchasers wrestle with 'should I or shouldn't I?'

By HILLEL SEGAL
Special to The Denver Post

Last April, IBM threw the personal computer industry for a loop by introducing its new PS/2 line of personal computers, intended to replace their PC, XT and AT models. Ever since then, business buyers of personal computers have been flocking to the new line, but a surprising number are reluctant to switch from their comfortable old machines.

To the delight of the other computer manufacturers — companies like Compaq, Tandy, and the dozens of "clone makers" — there are several good reasons for users *not* to buy the new IBM computers. The main reason is price. Incredibly low prices are being offered for look-alike or work-alike copies of the older PC models. In some cases, the clones are only one-third the cost of the new IBM machines.

According to surveys conducted of corporate buyers, about 50 percent of companies with older PCs have already bought at least one PS/2 machine, and practically all the rest plan to buy at least one in the coming year. And about 30 percent of those who already bought a PS/2 say they have decided to switch over to the new line.

Those are impressive statistics, but they hide the fact that many companies are simply trying out a single PS/2 machine while ordering dozens or hundreds of the older models, and I suspect that many of those who reportedly decided to switch are hinging their decision on the effectiveness of the yet-to-be-released OS/2 operating system.

OS/2 is not expected to be available until sometime in 1988 — meaning that until then the new machines will simply emulate the operation of the old ones. The PS/2s may be a bit faster, but software that takes advantage of the new hardware will have to wait.

What should you do — buy now or wait, switch or stick with IBM?

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To help you make up your mind, here are some pros and cons of going with the PS/2s if you're now in the market for a personal computer:

✔ PRO - Just as the IBM PC with the DOS operating system replaced the older generation of PCs with the CPM operating system in 1981, it's fairly likely that the PS/2 line will become the new standard in the coming years. In the long run, you'll probably have more options, greater performance, and a wider choice of software with the new machines.

✔ CON - In the short run — which might be as long as several years — the PS/2s will likely continue to emulate the older machines, offering the same application software with only minor performance improvements.

✔ PRO - The PS/2s come with easier-to-read color screens, smaller and more convenient higher-capacity floppy disk drives, and lots of good looks and pizzazz. They're the ultimate high-tech toys.

✔ CON - Many of the clones — the Tandy PCs are good examples — are great work-horse machines. They're compatible with virtually all current software and accept the same expansion circuit boards as the true-blue PCs, XTs and ATs. Not only that, Tandy is building a reputation for reliability and good service that was lacking before. In short, it's no longer necessary to go with only IBM to receive these benefits.

Considering all these factors, the bottom line for many people is simply price. If you can afford the luxury and security of the new IBM machines, you probably won't be disappointed. In fact, you'll probably love it. But if your budget is lower, there are so many good PC clones available that you'll certainly be able to find another excellent machine for your needs.

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